

Respect?

“I’ve learnt a lot about how to speak up, especially in meetings with politicians, where you have to really fight to be heard.”

“It’s got me thinking about how campaigning and lobbying can actually change things.”

“Respect? appealed to our sense of wanting to be empowered.”

“They used to say ‘you’re not just the face of the campaign, you’re the leaders of the campaign’. It was actually true.”

“Respect? was my first contact with high level professionals in government and media - now I want to work in public affairs and public policy.”

“I’ve realised that I can, even as a young person, make a difference.”

“It’s a really important and interesting campaign – there are lots of opportunities to get involved.”

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www.TheSite.org/respect

Young people speak up for better representation in the media

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Prepared for YouthNet and the British Youth Council by Katherine Cowan, February 2009.

A message from YouthNet's Chief Executive, Fiona Dawe

At YouthNet, the UK's first exclusively online charity, we are committed not only to guiding and supporting young people, but also to enabling them to make educated life choices, participate in society and achieve their ambitions. Empowering young people has been at the heart of our partnership with the British Youth Council for the *Respect?* campaign, which has seen us collaborating with, and being led by, young people themselves to challenge the negative stereotyping they constantly face in politics and the media.

Both organisations are hugely grateful to the young people who continue to drive this important campaign forward. Their participation in the evaluation and willingness to consider and critique their involvement over the past few years will help us to develop the way we work with them, and to share that learning more widely. In addition it reflects their commitment to the campaign and the partnership they have built with us.



A message from the British Youth Council's Chair, Emily Beardsmore

As a youth-led organisation, the British Youth Council (BYC) believes that all young people in the UK should be respected and able to influence and inform decisions which affect their lives. We are committed to celebrating the achievements of young people.

Working with YouthNet to empower the RYPAG to challenge unfair portrayals of youth in British society has created a vital platform for young people's opinions on this issue. In addition, the commitment of the RYPAG to putting young people's views at the heart of debate has meant that young people are now being seen as part of the solution to issues such as anti-social behaviour, not always the problem.

The RYPAG's participation in this evaluation will both strengthen the development of this campaign and share learning about youth-led campaigning. I also believe it will provide an inspiration to young campaigners across the UK.



Introduction

Over the past few years there has been a shift in the way that the voluntary and public sectors work with young people.

Young people are no longer simply viewed as the passive beneficiaries of services and policies – they are active stakeholders with valid views, needs and experiences.

Policy makers are increasingly advocating the involvement of young people. For example the Government's Aiming High for Young People – a ten year strategy for positive activities in England – refers to the *Respect? The Voice Behind the Hood* research (2006) and states:

“The Government will expand significantly young people’s direct influence and control on the design, commissioning and delivery of local services. This applies to all young people, but particularly those who are least likely to feel empowered to demand more of services.”

Involving young people sounds laudable, but what does it mean in practice? How can young people be involved in a way which is meaningful, not tokenistic and mutually beneficial? For many organisations, the idea of involving young people may still seem daunting.

YouthNet and the British Youth Council have been working with young people for a combined total of 75 years. The *Respect?* campaign was launched and led by young people aged 16 to 24 and supported by both organisations. The campaign continues to be successful and groundbreaking, in which the involvement of young people is a key factor.

This independent evaluation was commissioned to examine the practical way in which young people have been involved and to capture the good practice which has emerged. During the course of the evaluation, campaign materials and archives were examined and members of the RYPAG were consulted: firstly through a confidential questionnaire; then through in-depth interviews with a sample of participants.

This report documents the practical process of involving young people in the *Respect?* campaign, including how they were recruited, what they contributed, how they were supported, how their interest was maintained and what they themselves got out of it.

Finally, a list of top tips has been compiled, aimed at other organisations wanting to benefit from involving young people in their activities.

About the Respect? campaign

Background to the campaign

The *Respect?* campaign was launched in 2005 in response to research commissioned by YouthNet and the British Youth Council (BYC). The resulting report, *The Voice Behind the Hood: young people's views on anti-social behaviour (2006)*, revealed that over 80% of young people believe the way they are portrayed in the media and in political debate causes older people to respect them less.

In addition to this, YouthNet's online guide to life for 16 to 24-year-olds, TheSite.org, had received a number of posts on its message boards from young people concerned about the media's and politicians' demonisation of young people. In essence, it was felt that the media and politicians only focus on the negative actions of a minority of young people and fail to acknowledge the positive actions, achievements and interests of the majority of young people. It was argued that such negative stereotyping leads the rest of the population to view young people with mistrust and disrespect.

Aims and achievements

The *Respect?* campaign aims to:

- Ensure that young people's views are at the heart of political debate
- Challenge the use of labels and stereotypes in media coverage and government polemic
- Encourage decision makers to directly involve young people when drawing up policy and make informed judgements on youth issues
- Encourage young people to take action themselves.

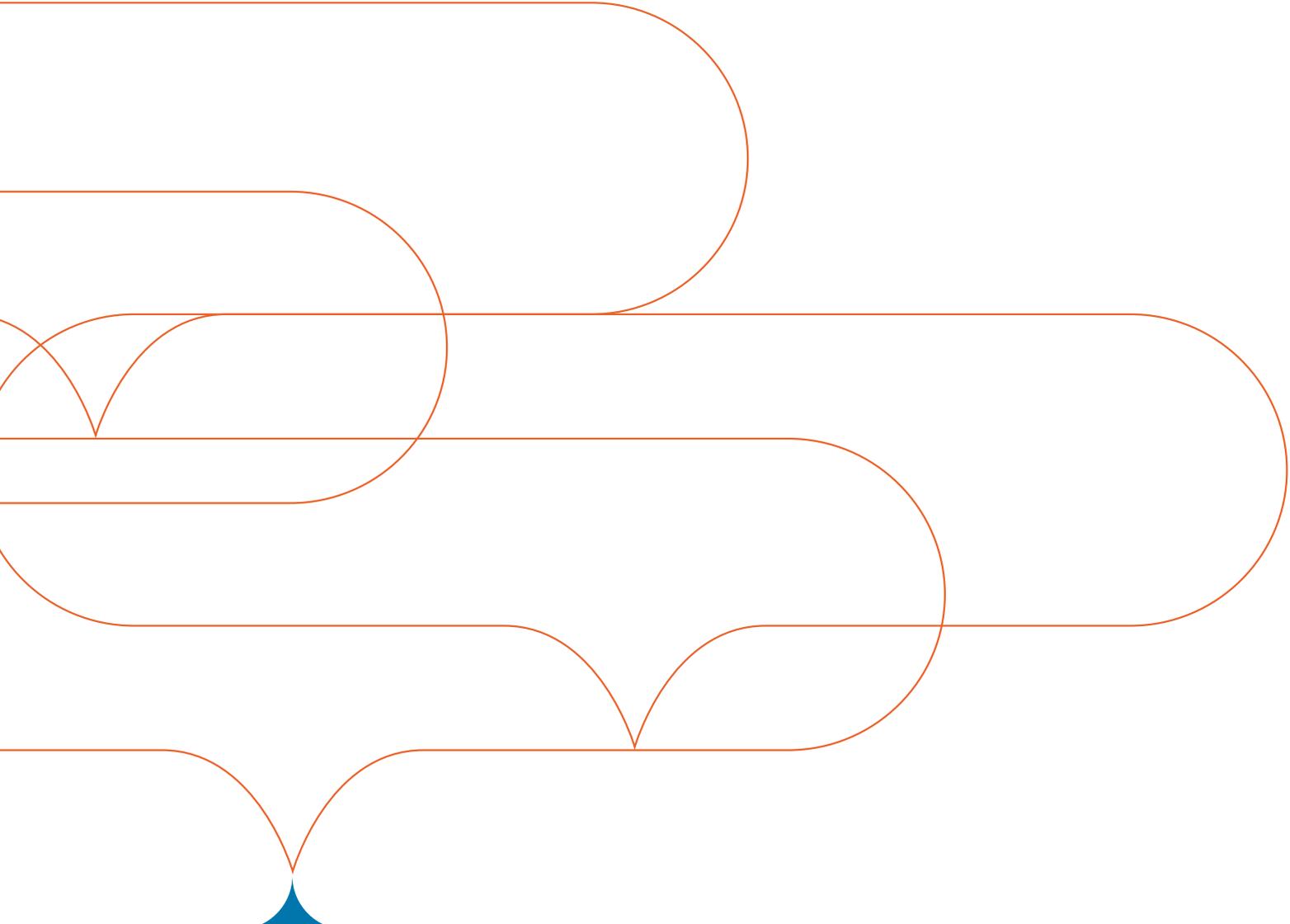
The campaign has made significant achievements through its activities:

Political lobbying led to an Early Day Motion being tabled by the newly appointed Vice Chair of the Labour party and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, Dawn Butler MP, on July 11 2007. It called for an end to negative representation and, to date, has secured 115 signatories. In addition, the Government's new youth strategy (*Aiming High for Young People: a 10 year strategy for positive activities*) acknowledged the *Respect?* research. A feature was added to TheSite.org to enable young people to email their MP.

Media and PR activity has secured extensive coverage since the campaign was launched including national, local and specialist press, and television and radio. Social media activity included: a *Respect?* campaign Facebook group which attracted over 400 supporters; blogging and online participation, such as YouthNet's input into a debate for the Media Standards Trust on the media portrayal of youth crime.

Mobilisation has seen campaign action moving from a strategic level to – more recently – grassroots action, with an appeal to young people across the UK to urge the media to represent them and their issues more fairly. This latest phase of the campaign asked 1,000 young people to sign an online pledge to speak up when they see a story in the media which affects them. One of the young people involved in the campaign has developed an online resource for TheSite.org offering young people tools to start actively campaigning. These include: ways to improve their communication skills, how to respond to mainstream media, blogging skills and representing their views online through film and photography.





The involvement of young people in the *Respect?* campaign has been integral to its success.

Involving young people

The *Respect?* Young People's Advisory Group

The *Respect?* campaign has been led and developed by a committed team of young people, who form the *Respect?* Young People's Advisory Group (RYPAG). They are supported by staff from BYC and YouthNet.

The RYPAG is formed of up to eight young people aged 16 to 24, with one member chairing the group on a rotational basis. The members discuss, plan and support the development of the campaign both online and by regular telephone communication. They come to London from across the UK for monthly meetings with the team from BYC and YouthNet. In addition to this, members act as representatives and spokespeople for *Respect?* – attending events, talking to journalists and meeting MPs. They also play a key role in influencing friends and connecting with other young people in order to promote the campaign message. For example, using online social networking facilities, such as Facebook.

The RYPAG ensures that young people are at the heart of the *Respect?* campaign and that its development is relevant and meaningful to them and their peers.

Recruitment

YouthNet and BYC used a formal recruitment process to appoint young people to the RYPAG. It was important that a wide range of young people would be able to contribute to the campaign, to ensure diversity of background, opinion and experience.

Positions on the RYPAG were advertised through existing youth involvement mechanisms, such as through the BYC and its many networks. However, it was also promoted on YouthNet's TheSite.org, bringing it to the attention of young people who might not usually have been involved in campaigning or already participating in youth groups or local activities.

In addition, the 747 young people who took part in *The Voice Behind the Hood* research were given the option of leaving their contact details if they were interested in being kept informed or in getting involved in further work with BYC and YouthNet. Those who left their email addresses were then contacted with information about the RYPAG.

As well as promoting the importance and potential impact of the campaign itself, YouthNet and BYC also emphasised the benefits and support available to members, such as access to training and expenses.

The application form explored a small number of basic areas:

- Interest in the RYPAG
- Skills for being an effective group member and media spokesperson
- Relevant experience, including school activities and voluntary and paid work
- Capacity to commit time to the project.

This allowed the applicants to describe their interests and experience, and ascertained their motivation for becoming an advisory group member, without being too arduous. The form also explored the applicants' own expectations of what they might get out of the experience

One issue which was raised during the campaign evaluation was the importance of responding quickly to applicants in order to hold their interest. Where substantial time is allowed to elapse between making an application and receiving a response, there is a risk that the young person may lose interest in the campaign, and take on other commitments instead. When this happened briefly during a later phase of the *Respect?* campaign, staff shortages were the cause. It is important to ensure the young people are aware when staffing issues may impact on regularity of communication, in order to maintain their interest.

Why are you interested in, and what do you hope to get out of, becoming a member of the advisory group?

APPLICANT'S MOTIVATION	APPLICANT'S EXPECTATION
Improve society's view of young people	Personal development
Challenge negative portrayal and stereotyping of young people	Professional development
Raise awareness of the importance of engaging young people	Make new friends and contacts
Challenge discrimination against young people	Increase personal confidence
Make a positive contribution	Gain campaigning experience

Involving young people

Who the young people were

Eight young people, who ranged in age from 17 to 23, were recruited from across the UK to become members of the RYPAG. Between them they had a variety of skills and qualities which it was felt would benefit the campaign, such as:

- Being open minded
- Being a good listener
- Enthusiasm for meeting people
- Interests in current affairs and the media
- Good communication skills
- Passion for, and commitment to, social justice.

It was important for the campaign that not all the members of the RYPAG were already engaged in youth involvement initiatives, thereby reflecting the wide experiences and interests and sense of empowerment, or disempowerment, of young people across the UK. This meant that there were some members of the RYPAG for whom the *Respect?* campaign was their first experience of lobbying and youth activism.

The members therefore had a range of experience which was relevant to *Respect?* and which suggested that they would be able to make an insightful and positive contribution to the campaign, for example:

- Voluntary and paid work experience, leading to practical organisational skills and contact with different stakeholders
- Involvement in a local youth group
- Participation in a national youth group, such as BYC
- Experience of running a student group or society
- Contribution to student publications
- Mentoring young people
- Experience of local activism and campaigning
- Personal experience of prejudice and discrimination as a young person.

It was suggested during the evaluation that the lack of age diversity among the young people was felt initially to be intimidating for the younger members. Indeed, the majority of those recruited to the RYPAG were in their early 20s. It is important for organisations involving young people spanning a large age range to be conscious of the difference in skills, experience and confidence between a 24-year-old and someone aged 16. At the time of writing, in order to address this, BYC and YouthNet are planning to recruit new younger members and arrange for an older member of the group to mentor them and support their contribution.

Why they got involved

There are certainly a growing number of opportunities for young people to get involved in social activism, to contribute to their communities and to make a difference. However the *Respect?* campaign specifically appealed to young people for several reasons.

Firstly, the topic itself was considered to be highly relevant, addressing an issue with which many young people could identify. RYPAG members suggested that negative stereotyping and demonisation of young people was something which affected and concerned all of them, but which seemed difficult to challenge. The *Respect?* campaign offered an opportunity to challenge that negativity strategically and effectively. For some participants, *The Voice Behind the Hood* research made a compelling case for action, which strengthened the young people's campaigning approach later on:

"The facts which came out of the research were very powerful. When we took those stats to politicians, they agreed."

Another strong draw for many was the media training which was offered to members of the RYPAG, as part of their role was to be media spokespeople for the campaign. For the young people, this was a key opportunity for personal development and professional experience, which they felt would make an impressive addition to their CVs.

The kudos of being involved in a UK-wide campaign was, for some, an attractive prospect. However, this was also seen as an opportunity to gain wider experience, knowledge and skills to apply in a local context, thus having an impact and making a contribution both nationally and within their local communities.

Finally, YouthNet and BYC themselves further enhanced the appeal of being involved in the *Respect?* campaign. Original levels of knowledge of the two organisations varied. While BYC was seen as a widely-respected nationally active youth organisation, YouthNet was less well known, but had a reputation for innovation and grassroots engagement with young people. For many its advice portal, TheSite.org, was a trusted source of information and guidance. As organisations with a track record for youth engagement and representation, BYC and YouthNet were seen as credible partners for the *Respect?* campaign.



What the young people contributed

The *Respect?* Young People's Advisory Group

The members of the *Respect?* Young People's Advisory Group drove the campaign forward by making a range of different types of contribution to its development, both proactive and reactive, practical and personal.

Practical contributions

BYC and YouthNet recognised the significant amount of time the members of the RYPAG contributed to the campaign. Members made time to attend meetings, act as spokespeople and, in between meetings, networked online and distributed flyers and emails to encourage friends and contacts to get involved. All the members had other commitments, including studies, work, family and friends. The allocation and contribution of their time to the *Respect?* campaign was recognised as a key factor in realising the campaign's achievements.

The involvement of young people in *Respect?* ensured the campaign was led by young people's ideas, and was therefore able to identify and truly focus on the current needs of young people. Taking into account their own experiences, and those of their contemporaries, the members were able to tap into the views of young people across the UK, who felt misrepresented by politics and the media. The members' ideas were integral to maintaining the campaign's relevance.

"My input was important because it allowed us to build up a 'young person's' attitude collectively and then, using this, we could identify the issues and their solutions."

Members' suggestions for the campaign were taken forward, and their feedback sought on the development of campaign plans, documents and materials. Ideas for the campaign were shared more widely using a Facebook group set up and maintained by the RYPAG members. This encouraged its supporters to be aware of media portrayal, to respond to it and to share their views on the issue.

Members attended quarterly meetings in London. The young people took turns to chair the meetings, which focused on the discussion of campaign activity and future planning. Minutes were taken and circulated among members, with details of actions. Meetings were also held with politicians and journalists following the launch of the *Respect?* research.

"I've learnt a lot about how meetings are run and how to speak up, especially in meetings with politicians, where you have to really fight to get what you want heard and not just follow what's on their agenda. I've learnt to put my point across and stick to it."

Talking to the media

Interaction with the UK media was a distinct element of the campaign which appealed to many of the RYPAG members. Following a day's media training and with the ongoing support of YouthNet and BYC, members of the RYPAG promoted the campaign and called for fairer and more representative media coverage of young people. They provided case studies and took part in interviews with journalists.

The young people publicised the *Respect?* message on television, on the BBC News Channel, and on the radio, including BBC Radio 5 Live, the BBC Asian Network, Sky News Radio, Smooth FM, Colourful FM and various local BBC radio stations. They also generated publicity in print, both in national publications, including The Guardian Society and Children & Young People Now magazine; and local titles, such as the Basingstoke Observer, Bexley Times, Edinburgh Evening News, Hampshire Chronicle, Liverpool Daily Post and Ulster Star.

“

The facts which came out of the research were very powerful.

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RYPAG Member:
Mohammed

“ I’m 21 years old and I live in Greenwich. I moved to the UK from Pakistan seven years ago. When I arrived I couldn’t speak much English. I stayed quiet most of the time. The way I learned English was to keep listening. Once I finished my GCSEs I really hit the road. My English improved and improved. I knew I wanted to go into politics and someone said that if you get active with young people’s organisations, that’s how you’ll build up your confidence and your networks. So, I got involved with Greenwich Young People’s Council and in 2006 I was elected to the UK Youth Parliament. I then heard about the British Youth Council and from them I heard about the *Respect?* campaign.

The details of the campaign said it would be a few meetings a year, plus we’d get media training, which really interested me. I don’t think it’s fair that young people don’t get the respect we deserve. The majority shouldn’t be demonised because a minority of young people cause trouble. I thought it would be a fantastic opportunity to challenge that and to get more experience.

I feel like I’ve contributed lots through the RYPAG. I’ve attended meetings with ministers and helped to get MPs to support the campaign. I’ve chaired meetings and I’ve also talked to the press. I’ve learned that, as young people, we can share our views in lots of ways and we shouldn’t be afraid of saying what we want to say. We can blog on websites, write letters to editors, ask MPs questions and talk to older people. And if we do, we can get our voices heard and older people will think more positively about young people.

I’ve got things out of it personally too. I signed up for the opportunity to get myself ready for the future. I wanted to come out with different skills and confidence, different kinds of knowledge, to meet different people and to get different experiences.

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The young people have publicised the *Respect?* message on the BBC News Channel, Sky News Radio, Smooth FM, Colourful FM and various local BBC radio stations.

“ ...In 2006 I was elected to the UK Youth Parliament. ”

What the young people contributed

Talking to politicians

Following the launch of *The Voice Behind the Hood* research, which was sent to almost 100 key policy, parliamentary and key workers in the field of youth affairs, the RYPAG acted as advocates for all the survey respondents. They drafted and acted as joint signatories on 640 letters to MPs. They then presented the research to 12 MPs, 11 civil servants and 34 other key stakeholders at a policy seminar. Following this, members of the RYPAG used TheSite.org to advise politicians on how to engage with young people.

Through the hard work of the RYPAG, and their input into the policy seminar, cross-party support for the research and *Respect?* was secured from elected representatives and MPs including George Osborne (Conservative), Jenny Willott (Liberal Democrats) and Dawn Butler (Labour). Also a meeting was held with Justine Greening, Youth Lead and Vice Chair of the Conservative Party. A conference call was held with Robert Brown MSP (Liberal Democrats) and a live webchat with Patrick Harvie MSP (Green). Acknowledgements and letters of support for the *Respect?* research and campaign were received from a number of MPs, including David Cameron, Leader of the Conservative Party.

"This excellent report shows why we are working hard to get to grips with the problems and concerns of young people today, and why it's so important to tackle the root causes of anti-social behaviour."

George Osborne MP, Shadow Chancellor, Conservative Party

"This report puts its finger on the pulse of young people and gives them a chance to speak for themselves. Its recommendations must be taken seriously by journalists, politicians and charities involved with youth work. Young people, like everyone else, want to have opportunities and to be treated with respect. Unfortunately, 'young-people bashing' has become something of a national pastime, one that we must snap out of."

Jenny Willott MP, Liberal Democrats, Youth Affairs spokesperson

"The issue of how we create more of a sense of mutual respect in communities is at the heart of the Government's Respect agenda and I welcome this opportunity to hear ideas and views from young people. It's really important to acknowledge that anti-social behaviour is not just committed by young people and I am looking forward to talking to the young people's Respect Advisory Group."

Parmjit Dhanda MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families

In 2007, an Early Day Motion was tabled, calling for an end to negative representation of young people, acknowledging that only a small minority of young people behave in an antisocial way. Noting the work of BYC and YouthNet in empowering young people to speak out on the issues that affect them, it stated that the media does not adequately recognise the positive actions of young people, and called on MPs to ensure that young people's views are represented in public debate "by creating opportunities for their input such as holding youth surgeries and visiting schools, colleges and universities."



How the young people were supported

Personal contribution

“One of the things I really love about Respect? is that you’re developing expertise. It’s great to have someone ring you up as an expert on young people’s issues.”

The contribution the members of the RYPAG made personally – a unique energy, enthusiasm and perspective – cannot be underestimated. The involvement of young people in the strategic planning and the practical delivery ensured the campaign was authentic, relevant and pitched at the right level to encourage policy makers and journalists to take note, and to encourage other young people to give their support.

Members of the RYPAG developed a level of expertise which would be hard to replace easily, hence the importance of retaining those members. Professional training and practical experience gained throughout the campaign have further increased the value of the young people involved.



Members of the RYPAG were the campaign’s most valuable asset

It is clear that the members of the RYPAG were the campaign’s most valuable asset. Supporting, developing and retaining their input was a priority for BYC and YouthNet.

Involving young people in any voluntary activity has challenges, including geography and disparate member locations, time constraints in terms of people’s availability, and competing commitments, such as family and friends, studies and work. Other voluntary work and campaigning activity were also factors. YouthNet and BYC recognised these challenges and were prepared to work around them, to ensure the young people could be involved.

Media training

“We had a day’s media training at YouthNet where we learned how to do media interviews, which really helped inspire everyone to say yes to journalists’ requests when they came up. It gave us confidence to express the message of Respect?”

A key component of the Respect? campaign was engagement with the media. One of the responsibilities of the RYPAG was therefore to act as media spokespeople. In order to give the members the skills and confidence they needed to talk to journalists, they received a day of media training. This included taking part in media interviews, linking to key messages and preparing for journalists’ questions. It also showed them how to facilitate interviews and identify opportunities to speak up publicly on the issue of the portrayal of young people in the media.

Offering this type of training was not only an incentive for many of the young people to get involved. A number of the young people also considered it to be a sign that the campaign was serious, that they were valued and that their contribution was genuinely required. It was suggested during this evaluation that a refresher media course would be helpful and would reinvigorate members’ participation.

Practical support

To ensure members of the RYPAG were able to make their contribution to the Respect? campaign, YouthNet and BYC offered them practical support. It was important that basic practical logistics did not create barriers to ongoing involvement in the campaign.

Firstly, a budget was set aside specifically to cover **expenses** for those travelling to meetings and events. Young people who needed assistance were helped to arrange transport, particularly those who were not based in London where the meetings were held. Younger young people and those who were not familiar with London’s transport system were met at the station.

Some of the young people travelling from outside London to attend meetings required overnight accommodation. Again, this was arranged for them by staff at YouthNet and was covered by the campaign budget.

The young people who were spokespeople to the media and to politicians were closely supported. YouthNet took responsibility for liaising with journalists, setting up interviews, emailing members to request their participation and ensuring the young interviewees felt briefed and confident speaking to the media.

YouthNet and BYC also provided practical **organisational support** to develop the RYPAG’s ideas. For example, after members developed a concept for campaign t-shirts and flyers, the organisations liaised with suppliers and managed budgets for design and print. The organisations also assisted the group with the development of their media and lobbying plans.

The young people who were spokespeople to the media and to politicians were closely supported.

A key component of the *Respect?* campaign was engagement with the media.

“ I’m 17 years old, I’m at college and I live in Lincolnshire. I’ve been a member of my local Youth Council since I was 11, and my involvement there got me interested in negative stereotyping of young people and crime in my area. It’s an issue which really gets me riled because I know so many young people who do so much for their community that doesn’t get noticed. And yet you’ve got one or two who do something wrong and it’s on the front page.

I heard about the *Respect?* campaign from a friend at the Youth Council and I applied to get involved. I wanted to get some ideas from a national campaign to put into my local group.

Going to my first *Respect?* meeting was the first time I’d been on a train to London on my own. I felt really supported though – they arranged my hotel and met me at the station.

At the meeting they were always asking for my opinions and my views. I never felt I couldn’t dare say anything. They were all friendly. When I went to the next meeting I already had the knowledge and everything, so I had the confidence to input more. There was another new member there, but I felt like I was already part of the group and I was able to help with her induction.

I’ve not been involved that long, but I’ve already been interviewed by Children and Young People Now magazine, which went really well. YouthNet set it all up and they made me feel confident to do it. They said they knew I could do it, reminded me that I knew stuff. They believed in me and that I did have the confidence to do it. I’ve also given interviews to Society Guardian and the Grimsby Telegraph.

The skills I’ve gained from the RYPAG will help me, mainly through confidence, being able to speak to a large audience, talking formally, writing minutes, stuff like that. Being part of a national youth group looks pretty good on your CV.

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How the young people were supported

Meetings

YouthNet and BYC made the practical arrangements for the RYPAG meetings. Meetings were held at YouthNet or BYC's offices. They were arranged by group consensus over email, with either YouthNet or BYC gathering individuals' availability and informing the group of the allocated dates in advance.

The meetings were informed by an agenda agreed by the RYPAG and prepared by YouthNet or BYC. Minutes and action points were produced after the meetings by the organisations and distributed via email to the members.

Steps were taken to ensure that the meeting environment was friendly and welcoming, while still being productive and professional. Members of the RYPAG said they felt comfortable speaking up, and commented that there was a comfortable balance of the informal (people felt able to relax and be themselves) and the formal (chairing and taking minutes and a sense of importance which ensured the proceedings were taken seriously).

The meetings tended to be held in London due to resource constraints. However, all members were recruited in the knowledge that this would be the case.

The organisations ensured that those living outside London were not excluded from participating, as they made a commitment to cover the expenses incurred. Further steps which the group agreed to, in order to facilitate active participation, were monthly conference calls and the option of evening meetings.

Communication

"We'd be like 'I've seen this [article], what does everybody think? Should we make a comment on it?' And if everyone agrees we will comment on the positive stuff just to say 'well done for putting positive stuff in.'"

During the course of the campaign, communication with the RYPAG members was mainly over email and telephone. Group messages were coordinated and sent by YouthNet, including details of meetings as well as general updates and requests for interviews and other activities. At the time of writing, YouthNet was also looking into the feasibility of communicating via TheSite.org in the future.

The RYPAG members also developed a *Respect?* Facebook group, through which they could discuss the campaign and share relevant information and thoughts with each other and a wider network of supporters. A further Facebook group for the RYPAG members was set up for the members to communicate between meetings and be reminded of meeting dates.

It was important to manage members' expectations about levels of communication. The volume of communication was dependent upon the level of activity that the group pursued, leading to peaks and troughs in email traffic and phone calls. One of the young people suggested that a culture of regular communication needs to be instilled from the start of a campaign, to get people into the habit of replying to emails. It was felt that constant and consistent communication was key in retaining enthusiasm, interest and commitment.



Maintaining interest and enthusiasm

Encouraging involvement

The young people noted that from the early stages of the *Respect?* campaign there was a clear plan and everyone had a specific role, responsibility or job to do, without them being overburdened. Having responsibility for a specific area of work was seen to be particularly helpful in demonstrating their experience to higher education providers and prospective employers.

Members were consulted at all stages of the campaign. Their input was also sought on all aspects of the development of campaign materials. For the exercise to be worthwhile and not tokenistic or patronising, input needed to be meaningful and the young people involved to their full potential. There were a variety of ways members could participate, from commenting on a document over email to meeting with MPs or journalists. Involvement in the campaign, therefore, suited the young people irrespective of their availability, interests and levels of confidence.

Teambuilding

One RYPAG member described meetings as like ‘seeing old friends’, while others felt there was scope for further teambuilding. It was suggested that an icebreaker at the start of meetings and increased opportunities for the members to socialise together would create an even stronger sense of team spirit. Ideas included having coffee and cake in the kitchen after meetings, or going to a café or another age-appropriate venue.

It was felt that getting to know people better socially would ensure more regular communication among the members, as well as helping them to better understand each other’s strengths and skills within the RYPAG. At the time of writing, BYC and YouthNet plan to hold more social gatherings in 2009 and give each member in turn the opportunity to choose a venue which is important or relevant to them.

Feeling valued

“They used to say ‘you’re not just the face of the campaign, you’re the leaders of the campaign, it’s coming from you.’ It was actually true and I think that made us feel like we were more than young people available to be wheeled out.”

BYC and YouthNet were keen to ensure that the RYPAG members were aware of how much they were valued and how important their contribution was. Feeling valued was clearly an important factor in securing ongoing commitment and contribution to the campaign.

Members suggested that the way in which they were made to feel valued ranged from simple informal acknowledgement through to more official recognition, such as:

- Being thanked
- Being asked for ideas and opinions
- Receiving feedback on their contribution
- Having their travel and accommodation arranged and paid for
- Being nominated for an achievement award.

It was suggested that the practical support given to enable the young people to make their contribution in the first place reinforced their sense of being a valuable asset to the campaign, and further secured their loyalty and interest.

“It was just little things like, my transport, making sure I got there on time. On my first meeting, I stayed in a hotel overnight and they gave me money for tea and stuff like that. It felt like I was an important member, to want me there that much that they were paying for stuff like that.”

Some members noted that balancing their other commitments with *Respect?* work could be challenging. The fact that YouthNet and BYC did not add to their pressures was appreciated, and that even a small contribution was welcomed. This ensured that the young people who found themselves managing multiple commitments did not feel they had to leave the RYPAG altogether.

“They were always really, really lovely. If you couldn’t do something, they reminded us that any contribution was better than nothing.”

Campaign progress and development

“As I became more aware of negative press, I started to spot it more in the media. Once you’ve developed expertise in something, it’s quite fun to see it progress.”

The young people’s suggestions for the direction of the campaign were taken on board and it was evident to them that *Respect?* and its impact had grown and developed.

Changing the culture of the media and of political rhetoric is no small task, but it was recognised that the campaign had opened up a dialogue where one had not previously existed. Members suggested that seeing the campaign develop from a lobbying initiative to a grass roots mobilisation campaign, and seeing their expertise within that grow, was highly motivational. For a number of the RYPAG members, ensuring that the campaign had grass roots impact and outcomes was really important. They wanted to see practical action following on from all the strategic planning.

During the evaluation, young people suggested that it was helpful and motivating to have a clear plan in place, where they were assigned and were accountable for specific tasks which contributed to the wider remit of the campaign. It was felt that it was important to see the practical outcomes of the plans.

“ I’m 21 now, but when the *Respect?* campaign started, I had just begun an undergraduate degree. I’m now studying for a Masters and am working part time at YouthNet. I found out about *Respect?* after doing work experience with YouthNet’s editorial team. During my two weeks there I took part in *The Voice Behind the Hood* research. I included my email address in my response, and they got back in touch with me afterwards to see if I was interested in joining the RYPAG.

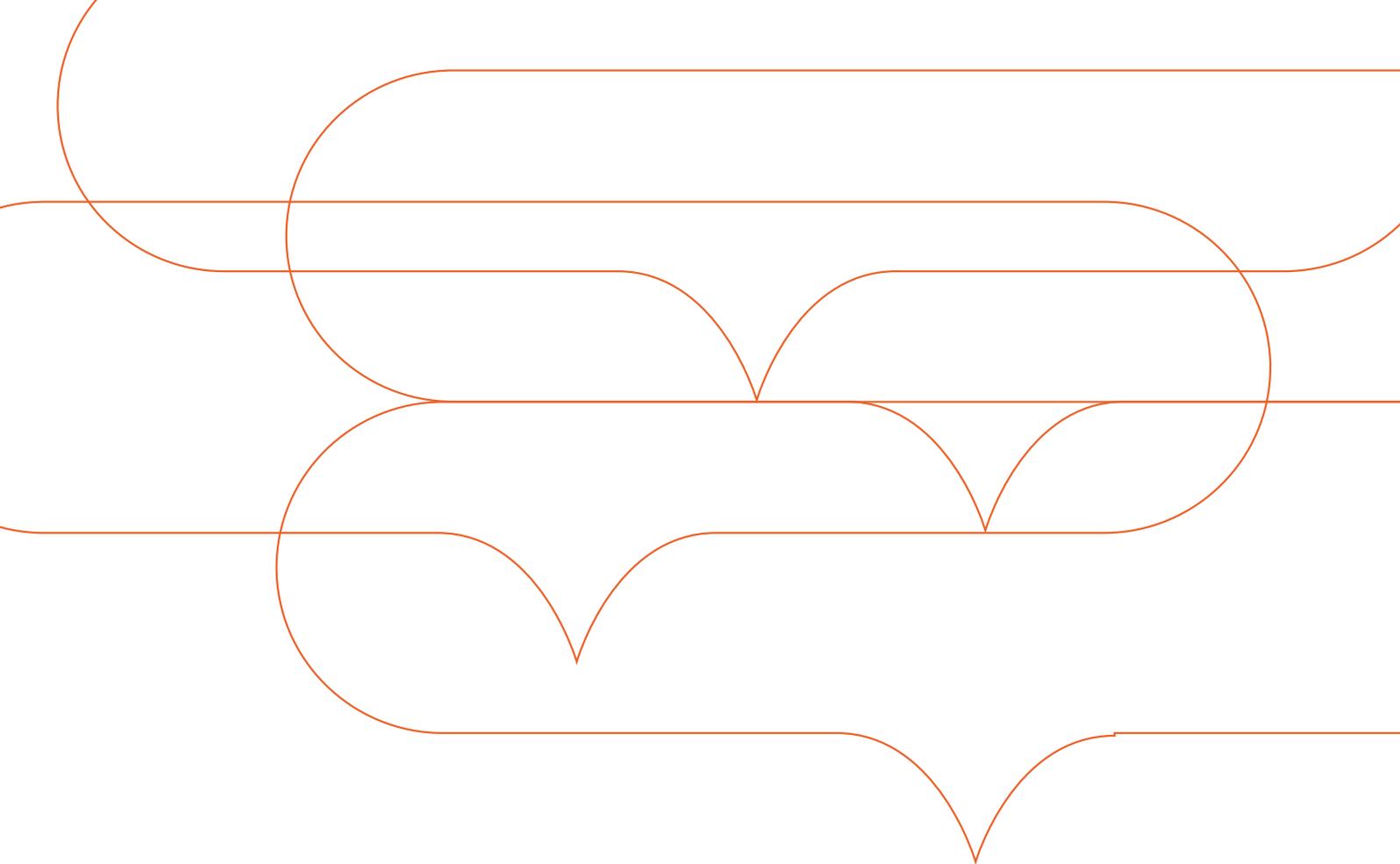
The campaign appealed to me because I am interested in politics, and I wanted to make a difference. When you’re a young person you have very little power but lots of ideas and yet you’re least able to do anything about it. You’re desperate to get started on something but the opportunities all seem to be closed. I think for all of us, *Respect?* appealed to our sense of wanting to be empowered.

I have made a particular contribution to the third phase of the campaign. I wrote material for TheSite.org and started the media plan for it. I try to ensure in networking meetings that the MP or journalist in question feels it has been a productive meeting. I sometimes provide feedback on documents that have been sent round for the group’s approval. The media training was really useful, and it was a fun day.

Having worked at the YouthNet offices on the campaign for a week, I understand how valuable my input was and how necessary it is to have young people involved at a managerial level. My volunteer managers were always very helpful and grateful for my help. I’m not sure I realised how hard they work on it themselves until then!

Respect? was my first contact with high-level professionals in government and media. I used to want to be a journalist but now I want to work in public affairs and public policy, and this is the main experience I have in that. It’s enthused me and made me realise that I can, even as a young person, make a difference.

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The Government will expand significantly young people's direct influence and control on the design, commissioning and delivery of local services.

Policy makers are increasingly advocating the involvement of young people.

What the young people got out of it

New skills

“With work experience, it’s great but you might not find out how things work on a higher level. But this campaign is really about high level political and public policy stuff. Having the sense that you’re doing something real is really important.”

Members of the RYPAG said that they gained a great deal from their involvement in the campaign, particularly in terms of their skills. This was both in a professional sense, as well as in terms of campaigning and lobbying. It was felt these skills would also benefit their local community involvement.

Being able to develop useful professional skills and evidence when applying for jobs was a key reason for getting involved in the campaign, and was certainly something from which many members felt they gained. Examples included understanding meeting protocols, such as minutes and chairing, effective team-working and writing articles.

For some, it was felt that involvement in the *Respect?* campaign had demanded more responsibility and delivered more experience than ordinary work experience would have done.

The experience of speaking to the media was highly valued by the RYPAG members. This had given them communication skills which they would also be able to apply in other contexts, such as speaking to different audiences and stakeholders, including senior people, decision makers and policy makers, both as campaigners and in their future careers.

Insight

“It’s given me an opportunity to see how things are done.”

Some of the young people felt that being involved in *Respect?* had significantly improved their understanding of the way in which different institutes, bodies and initiatives work and can be influenced, including:

- Charities
- Government
- Media
- Public policy
- Research
- Lobbying and campaigning.

Some suggested that having a sense of how these operate was hugely empowering.

“I think it’s nice for young people to feel like they’ve got the inside info on something. I think that really helps to make them feel important, and I think that’s something we don’t get very much as we’re on the end of all these schemes, we’re on the receiving end, we’re the beneficiaries of loads of government policy and charity work, like YouthNet’s work. But to be involved in it from the other side, it makes you feel good.”

With increased awareness came a realisation of further opportunities and options, both for their own careers and for other campaigns and volunteering work.

Personal development

“I’ve got so much confidence from all the activities I’ve been involved in over the past few years. I can talk to anyone on any topic.”

From a young person’s perspective, getting involved in a campaign can have a very positive impact on their personal development. This was certainly the case among RYPAG members who suggested that the experience they had gained, the skills they had acquired and their achievements had greatly increased their personal confidence. The media training was thought to be a key factor in increasing individuals’ confidence in talking to people and ensuring their point of view was delivered.

Others felt that bringing together a diverse group of young people who did not previously know each other, had resulted in them not only making new friends, but had also increased their understanding of people from different backgrounds.

“It has made me more open to others’ opinions and cultures.”

Finally, involvement in a worthwhile cause, and the feeling of making a positive contribution, gave a number of the RYPAG members a feeling of empowerment and increased self esteem.

“I feel as though I am helping to make a difference to young people’s lives and society.”

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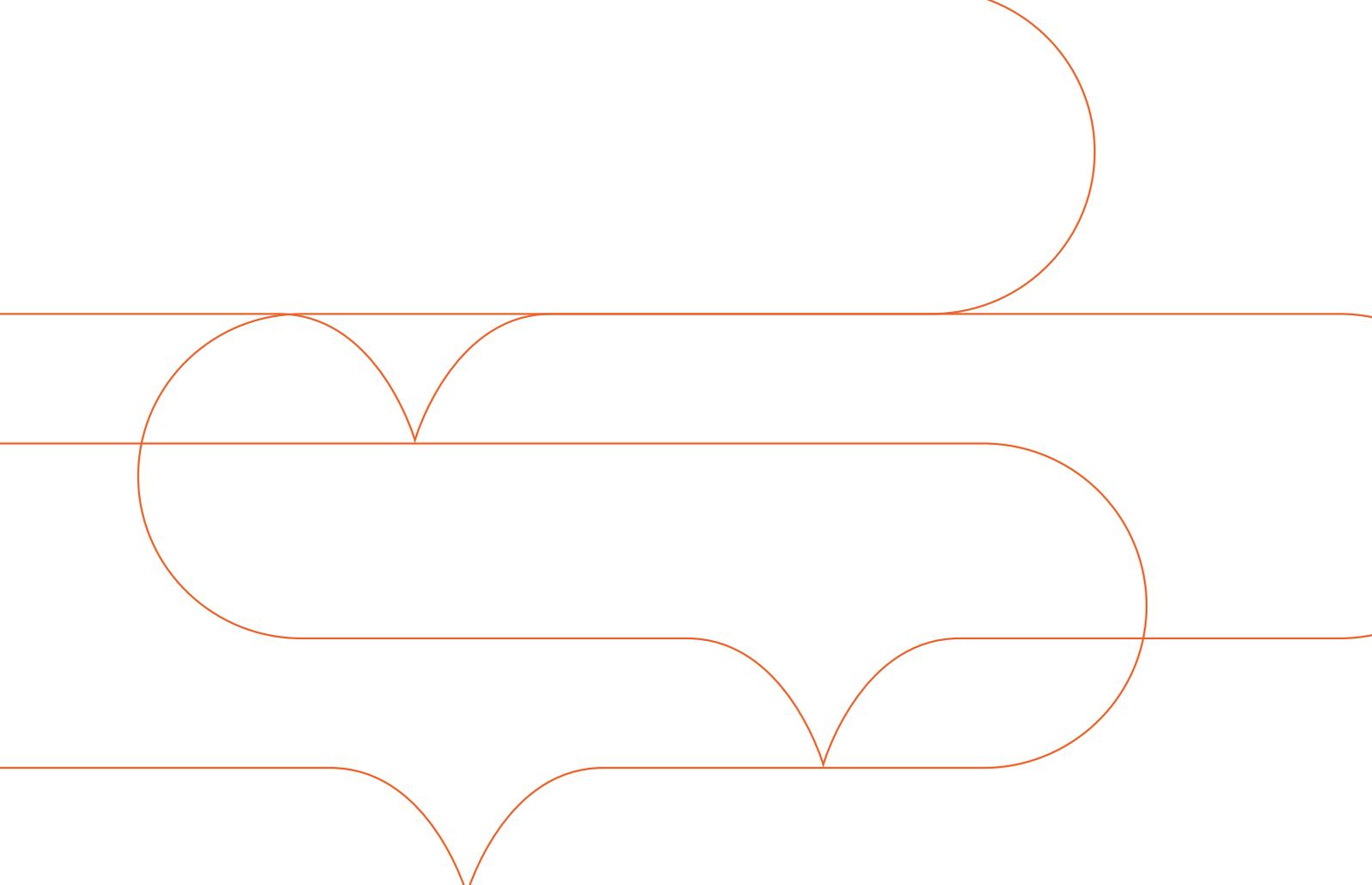
I'm 23 and I've just finished studying for my Masters. I'm very involved in Student Action on Refugees and I run an after school club for 90 refugees and asylum-seeking children in South West London. Five years ago I was a delegate to the BYC from St John's Ambulance. At the BYC AGM I was voted on to their Campaign for Communications sub-committee, and through that I found out about the *Respect?* campaign.

Respect? appealed to me because there is a lot of stereotyping of young people and painting the majority with the actions of the minority. Because I work with a group who are very excluded from society, I've seen what an effect it has on those young people. Quite often they're seen as antisocial when actually they're really nice kids who have a lot on their plates and have quite a hard life. Negative media portrayal makes their lives even harder and because of that, I thought it was a great opportunity for me to make a difference and get them involved.

It's a really important and interesting campaign and there are lots of opportunities to get involved. I've done a lot of media work, I've met with a variety of MPs and given a presentation to help launch the campaign. By being involved, my friends know about the campaign and are interested in it.

It's really got me thinking about how campaigning and lobbying can actually change things and I would be interested in trying to do more of it in the future, especially with young asylum seekers and refugees. I would never have thought about it before I got involved in the RYPAG – I wouldn't have known what the options were or how to get involved in changing public policy. Now I have a good idea of those things. It's given me confidence in talking to decision makers, it's shown me how to go about getting in touch with influential people and how you can make a difference on a bigger scale.

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Young people are active stakeholders with valid views, needs and experiences.

Policy makers are increasingly advocating the involvement of young people.

Conclusion

New skills

The involvement of young people in the *Respect?* campaign has been integral to its success. It has ensured the campaign, which set itself objectives for long-term challenges and calls for change, has remained focused and relevant.

BYC and YouthNet have found that by engaging young people in a structured but flexible way, those young people have been encouraged and enabled to make a creative, meaningful and productive contribution to the management, development and application of the campaign. Ensuring those young people realised their value, both as the advocates for their peer group and as volunteers, has been an important reason that many members who were recruited to the RYPAG in 2005 remain active and committed members in 2009. By continuing to listen to the views of the members of the RYPAG, and remaining responsive to their experiences and needs as volunteers, campaigners and members of society, YouthNet and BYC will secure their current and future involvement in the campaign.

The contributions made by members of the RYPAG clearly demonstrated the key principles for the *Respect?* campaign: to recognise the positive contribution which young people make, and to give them the respect they deserve.

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To recognise the positive contribution which young people make, and to give them the respect they deserve.

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Top tips for involving young people in campaigning

What's in it for me?

While many young volunteers are motivated by a personal sense of social responsibility to get involved, they should also be able to get something back for themselves. Stress the benefits of involvement, such as professional experience, new skills, fun and friends.

Recruit a diverse group

Ensuring the young people involved are from a diverse range of backgrounds will help secure varied experience and opinion, increase creativity and ensure an environment in which people feel welcome and not excluded or intimidated.

Be clear from the start

Involve the young people in the planning of the campaign and be clear about their role and responsibilities. Allocation of specific tasks with tangible outcomes will retain motivation, and give the young people experience to add to their CVs.

Make it easy to get involved

Have a budget for expenses, including travel, meals and accommodation, if needed. Most young people have limited incomes which will prohibit their involvement if expenses are not covered. Reimbursement should be prompt.

Busy schedules

Young people have a variety of commitments, from family and studies to paid and voluntary work. Scheduling events and meetings in advance will allow them to plan their time and make commitments to the campaign. Too much pressure may result in withdrawal – make sure they know any contribution is valued.

Training

If specific skills are required for the campaign, offer training. This is a good incentive for young people to get involved in the first place, and will enhance the quality of the work they deliver.

Communication

Many young people have a lot going on in their lives, so they appreciate regular communication to keep them informed and enthused. Use what works for them, such as email, phone calls, text messages, MSN messenger, Skype or social networking sites like Facebook or Bebo.

Invite them into the office

It is helpful for young people to understand their role, responsibilities, working environment and even the limitations of the paid staff coordinating the campaign. Invite them in to see behind the scenes – they may identify further opportunities for involvement or work experience.

Teambuilding

Organise social time for the young people at age-appropriate venues, after or in between meetings, to allow the team to get to know each other, to ascertain one another's strengths and interests and to encourage communication and the exchange of ideas outside meetings.

Hold their interest

Regular progress reports are helpful in keeping young people interested in the campaign, and empowered to keep contributing. They will want to see the outcomes of their ideas and how their suggestions are taken forward in order to be motivated to keep contributing.

Give regular tasks

Keep giving them small but useful tasks, especially if they are unable to take part in a time-consuming activity. Simple actions, such as giving them leaflets to distribute to their friends or prompting them to send emails to their contacts, will maintain the campaign's momentum, and make the young people feel part of it.

Be responsive

Appearing to be too busy to respond to the young people who are involved can be extremely demotivating. They are giving up their free time to work as volunteers and will not appreciate being put at the bottom of the pile.

Say thank you!

Acknowledgement of contribution and positive feedback is a key factor in maintaining young people's involvement in a campaign, and therefore in retaining their input, expertise and enthusiasm. For those who make a significant contribution, explore opportunities for nominations to young people's awards.

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British Youth Council

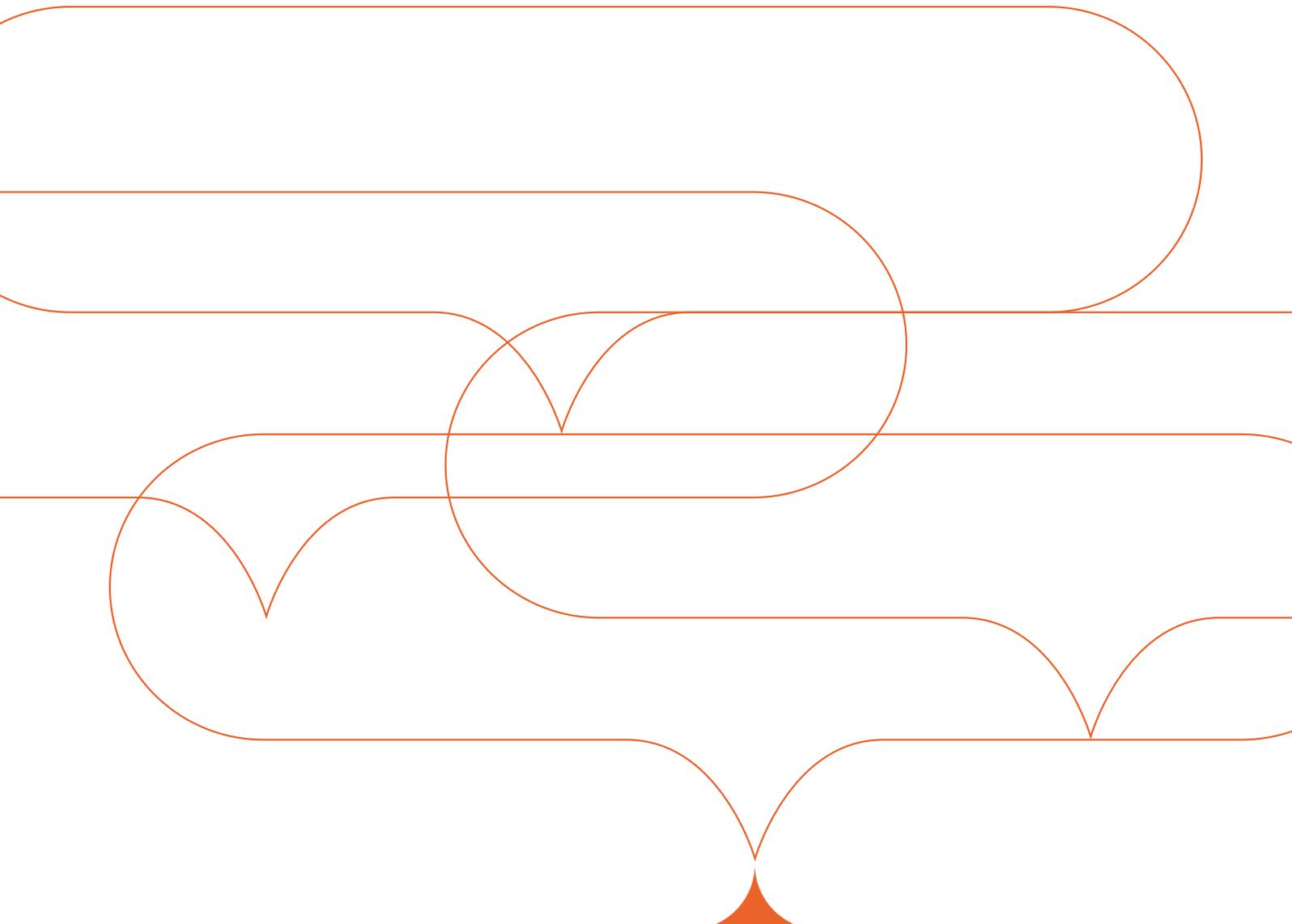
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About the author:

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